

# Fear Not This Body

by

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Body shame is an insidious part of Western culture. As a fat woman, I am intent upon expressing and sharing the beauty of bodies that are commonly vilified in an effort to combat that shame.

In my MFA thesis exhibition, I present an installation consisting of a series of larger-than-life nude self-portraits alongside a series of enameled objects that I call *bodies*: these share forms with various stereotypical feminine body types, present diverse skin tones and textures, and feature assorted anatomical features typically coded as unsightly or undesirable. The large portraits envelop the viewer in a fat body and encourage them to pick up and interact with these small enameled representations of fatness. The final portion of the installation is the sticky-note wall; a participatory activity with viewers based on vulnerability research and an experiment I performed within Jenkins Fine Arts Center over the month of September.

The work has already helped others, and I expect to continue making body- and fat-positive works in order to continue helping viewers gain their own confidence.



Fear Not This Body

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the School of Art and Design

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Fine Art in Art

by

Carolyn Adda Buss

December 2019

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*This work is dedicated to the late Seb Barnett.*

*Your support and confidence in me nurtured the artist I was sure wasn't there.*

*You are wherever green things grow.*

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Thanks to my mom: without your support in the form of kitten photos, I probably would have gone mad before finishing this document.

And finally, my sincerest appreciation to my husband, Garrett Highley, for supporting us through my degree. Now it's your turn! I love you.

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## INTRODUCTION

We fear being fat. This is due in part to the socially conditioned judgements we make of people who are fat, judgements fueled by constant the barrage of propaganda we receive from the multibillion-dollar diet and healthcare industries, warning us of the so-called dangers of being fat. Individually, we try to solve *fat* by going to extreme measures: adhering zealously to the latest fad diets, obsessively exercising in order to “earn” whatever calories we were too “weak” to resist.

*Fear Not This Body* is a body of work presented as an art installation. The organization of my installation was inspired by the work of artists like Kara Walker, who creates installations that evoke a deep and often painful emotional reaction. *Fear Not This Body* incorporates a tactile aspect because touching and holding something in the hand is about connection and intimacy. Small sculptural pieces, in conjunction with photographs and pillows became the visual language I used to create the intimate and expressive work I created.

My work highlights the beauty of bodily features typically seen as undesirable, such as fat rolls, stretch marks, cellulite, café-au-lait spots, and varicose veins. The bodies on the pillows allow the viewer to interact with a symbol of fat bodies in a safe way, allowing the viewer to feel the texture of skin or cellulite, or to run one’s fingers over rolls and veins—an experience I imagine many people are unfamiliar with. The photos serve as screens between the bodies, allowing the viewer to engage with the work in a more intimate manner. The participatory portion of the installation gives viewers the opportunity to add to a text-based conversation on self-love that I initiated within the Jenkins Fine Arts building over the period of a month.

I invite the audience to reflect on their own priorities with regards to self-love and how we give love to others, or who we withhold it from. My intention is that the viewer will find new ways to empathize with themselves and others through the experience of the work.

## THE PROBLEM IN CULTURAL CONTEXT

One of the earliest depictions of the human form was the *Venus of Willendorf*, created sometime between 22,000 to 30,000 BC and discovered in Austria in 1908. The statue is referred



Figure 1 A female Paleolithic figurine, *Venus of Willendorf*. Credit: Wellcome Collection. CC BY 4.0

to as *Venus* due to its enlarged breasts, stomach, thighs, vulva, and buttocks, which are thought to denote fertility. Fat likely meant something very different in early Europe, and outside modern Western society, it is often still considered much more favorably; according to a 2008 study by Frederick, Forbes and Berezovskaya, “[i]n many non-Western societies, moderate to high levels of body fat in women have long been equated with health, physical attractiveness, social status, and fertility” (p. 203).

However, increased exposure to Western beauty standards is challenging the traditionally held belief in many of these societies that big is beautiful (Frederick et al p. 205).

The omnipresence of images in contemporary Western society prompts us to internalize the ideal that is set for us by the media, and this is detrimental to our health and well-being. According to a 2004 by Spettigue and Henderson, “the messages and images that focus on the value of appearances and thinness for females have a significant negative impact on body satisfaction, weight preoccupation, eating patterns, and the emotional well-being of women in Western culture,”(p. 18). It’s interesting to note that it’s more harmful when the emphasis is on the *value* of being or staying thin; that *not thin* is implicitly assumed to be a less valuable state of being.

A 2019 study by Kersbergen and Robinson found that “people with obesity are blatantly dehumanized. This tendency to consider people with obesity as less human reveals the level of obesity stigma and may facilitate and/or justify weight discrimination.” (Kersbergen, Robinson p1005) *Blatant dehumanization* is the explicit and overtly communicated belief that a person is less human than another. It has largely been studied in context of obesity prejudice in the United States.

Body shame manifests dangerously as a fear of going to the doctor, due in part to implicit and explicit bias against people with obesity by physicians and surgeons (Puhl, et al). In recent years, an increasing number of people have spoken out about the treatment they have been denied on account of their size. For example, a 2016 *New York Times* article “Why Do Obese Patients Get Worse Care? Many Doctors Don’t See Past the Fat”, a woman—Patty Nece, 48 of Alexandria, Va. — detailed how, even after losing seventy pounds and describing her symptoms to her new doctor, he told her to go on a diet before he would treat her for a chronic hip pain. When she finally found a doctor who would treat her, they found she had progressive scoliosis—a condition that is not concomitant with fatness, (Kolata 2016).

## IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT BIAS: FATPHOBIA

*“For those who feel the stigma of a fat body or fear of a fat body, we want you to know this isn’t your personal failing, it’s our culture that is failing you. It’s not easy to appreciate your body in a culture where your body is vilified. Oppression, by removing us from belonging, is writ large upon our bodies and literally killing us.” – Bacon, Severson 2019*

Societal fatphobia negatively impacts people around the world. The persistent myth that fat people cost more to an employer results in their lower likelihood to be hired, or to be paid equally. Fatphobia from coworkers and managers resulted in French author Gabrielle Deydier losing her job and having to move into a youth hostel, despite her actual qualifications (Marsh, 2019). Deydier later wrote a book about grossophobia (fatphobia) titled *What It’s Like to be Fat in France* which chronicles her experience living in France as a fat woman. Deydier lived in Spain for a year, and no one ever asked her why she was fat, but contrasted that with how conversations with French people went, she said: “I’d be a couple of minutes into a conversation and it would be: ‘But why are you fat? Was that a choice? Is it an illness?’” (Marsh 2019).

Stigma against people of size manifests as discrimination present not only in the workplace, but in movie theaters, restaurants, bathrooms, airplanes: anywhere a human might exist publicly and where having a larger body impedes normal use of the environment. Explicit fatphobia allows society to vilify fat people as a source of rising healthcare costs, regardless of evidence; it encourages people to judge those of us with large bodies as lazy, diabetic, “going to die,” and to accuse them of promoting unhealthy lifestyles when they resist such categorization. None of the scientific studies relating to high medical costs associated with obesity discuss the fact that BMI –Body Mass Index– one of the most prominently cited measurements in anti-fat rhetoric, was discredited as a useful tool by which to measure the overall health of an individual (Ortega et al 2016.) According to the Center for Disease Control website, medical costs

associated with obesity were \$147 billion in 2009 (Finklestein et al 2009), while medical costs associated with tobacco use were \$300 billion in 2015 (Xu et al 2015). Yet, smoking is still considered more acceptable than being fat. Beautiful people in movies can chain smoke cigarettes and remain sex icons, but fat characters can aspire to be comic relief at best.

Fat people are overlooked in clothing stores, and even though there are many more online options than there ever have been, there is a distressing lack of brick-and-mortar stores that cater to larger bodies. Even large chain stores that have the room for expanding their size ranges don't carry many items in store, or their offerings in sizes over 14 fluctuate unpredictably: "when a woman can't count on finding her size at a particular store, the store is removed from her list of options" (Lamare 2018). Most people's response to this critique is to shame them in an attempt to make them decide to lose weight so that they can shop at stores that carry smaller –sometimes called *straight—sizes*.

Surprisingly, shame doesn't motivate most people into doing much of anything, except to be more self-conscious. In a study conducted by Brené Brown, which she later detailed in her 2004 book *Women and Shame*, every single female subject reported having experienced shame over something, and over 90% of them reported experiencing body-related shame in particular (*Women* p 43). Brown's proposed solution to shame seems simple on the surface: self-compassion and increased vulnerability with others.

And she was not the first to propose this. Early fat-positive counter-culture movements date back to the 1960's and included organizations such as the NAAFA (National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance) and ASDAH (Association for Size Diversity and Health). NAAFA began as a civil rights organization to promote fat acceptance, and it is no coincidence that consideration of discrimination against fat people coincided in the 1960's and 1970's with more



mainstream civil rights movements for African Americans and disabled people. Like so many other long- and widely held beliefs, the thin feminine ideal was brought into question. Fat activists worked to get their message out via zines –an easy and affordable to produce format. One of these zines is the Fat Liberation Manifesto written by Judy Freespirit and Aldebaran (see Appendix II for full text). The manifesto details the demands of the Fat Liberation Movement, the second of which states:

WE are angry at mistreatment by commercial and sexist interests. These have exploited our bodies as objects of ridicule, thereby creating an immensely profitable market selling the false promise of avoidance of, or relief from, that ridicule, (Freespirit Aldebaran 1973).

## RADICAL SELF LOVE: PART OF A SOLUTION

Things are getting better—slowly. My own journey and history with fat activism and body acceptance began around 2009 with Tumblr, a social media website, where I was first exposed to fat authors and activists. People like model Tess Holliday, photographer Substantia Jones, author Sonya Renee Taylor, and fashion designer Gabrielle Gregg lead the charge on making fat folks *seen*. Visibility and representation in media are one of the most important factors in helping a society—and the individuals within it—come to accept an attitude or group of people they might have previously been prejudiced against and these women in the late 2000’s were a spearhead for fat acceptance (Tukachinsky et al 2015). Their confidence, and the confidence of the generation of fat-positive people that followed them exists within the context of a massive diet industry and a culture built on shame. This is why loving your body as it is now, fat or not, able or not, beautiful or not, is such a radical and difficult act. This is why I make work to promote body acceptance.

For the participatory section of my installation, I chose the phrases “I love you”, “You are worthy of love” and “I can love others, I can love myself.” I was thinking about notes left in lunchboxes from Mom, self-help books, and the incessant positivity that is washing over our culture. The phrase “I can love others, I can love myself” is a modified version of American hip-hop goddess Lizzo’s statement during her Tiny Ass Desk Concert:

“If you can love me, you can love yourself.” Lizzo is a fat, black woman.

She is loud, proud, joyful. She exudes confidence. Twitter user Angela

Mayfield compared her statement to a similar one made by RuPaul Charles’

“If you don’t love yourself, how the *Hell* you gonna love anybody else?”

Mayfield explained in a tweet:

One says that the love you give others is false, invalid, not real love,  
because you don't give it to yourself as well. The other says that  
BECAUSE you are capable of loving others, caring for others, you are  
capable of extending that affection to yourself, and deserving, too.

(Mayfield, 2019)

Allowing ourselves the grace to truly love ourselves in a world with massive industries invested in our self-hate—self-hate under the guise of self-love and health—is a radical act. We can deny these corporate interests our valuable time and money simply (though not easily) by accepting each other and ourselves. More pivotally, I think coming to love ourselves through our ability to love others might be the greater point of human life.

## CONTEMPORARY INFLUENCES

It's no surprise that women artists are creating work that makes the viewer uncomfortable. Fat or thin, women's bodies are taboo: their processes are considered mysterious and unspeakable, even amongst women. We've been told to hide them, to show them; we've been told how to look, what to do, and how to be our entire lives, for thousands of years, and we're tired of it.

My contemporary artist inspirations for this body of work center on female artists who deal with complex issues of femininity, reproductive issues, pleasure, the body, domestic work, women's work, weight, beauty, and ugliness, hard and



Figure 2 Suzanna Scott *Triune* (*Fiber Forms Collection*) 2016 aluminum foil, fabric, thread. 11 x 4 x 3 1/2 in. Photo by Suzanna Scott. <http://www.suzannascott.com/art/fiber-fetishes/view/680358/1/680407>

soft, among  
others.



Figure 3 Suzanna Scott *Wearing/Cradling Raw Guts*. 2015 rope, paper, plaster, resin, metal coating, patina, wax. Photo by Suzanna Scott. Downloaded from <http://suzannascott.blogspot.com/2015/06/raw-guts.html>

Suzanna Scott uses visible stitching on fabric covered aluminum foil forms in order to “give voice to the body”. She believes the body “is both sensual and ghastly,” and in her series *Fiber Fetishes* (Fig 2), she “explore[s] the intricate web in/of our reproductive bodies[.]” Her works evoke

flesh through their forms and color, but flesh that has been mummified, meticulously stitched together

as in *Triune*. With the piece *Raw Guts* (Fig 3), she wrote a blog post and shared a photo of it being worn in what could easily be a contemporary jewelry exhibition. Of *Raw Guts*, she said

she “wanted to create forms that are both in and of the body, neither definitively male or female but a tug-a-war of body parts.”

United Kingdom-based textile artist Sally Hewett questions how cultural influences how we perceive bodies in her artist statement:

“Are some characteristics of bodies inherently beautiful, or ugly, or disgusting? Or because we see everything through the veil of culture, fashion and convention is it almost impossible for us to see bodies objectively? I am interested in how we see things and how we interpret what we see: does my particular way of representing bodies, using fabrics and stitching, affect how the content of the work is seen?”

(Hewett, 2017)

Hewett’s questions resonated with work I’d been doing for quite a long time but didn’t have words for myself.

One of Hewett’s series is dedicated to bodies that have surgery scars and other “bodily detritus.” The 2017 artwork *Caesar’s arrival* depicts fresh surgical staples, angry red stretch marks, and black stubble using embroidery techniques on a skin-like textured fabric of a light creamy color [fig 4]. This



Figure 4 Sally Hewett *Caesar's Arrival*, 2017. Lycra, jersey, padding, embroidery silk, surgical staples, quilting hoop. 65x33x10cm. Photo: Sally Hewett, [https://www.sallyhewett.co.uk/photo\\_15860150.html](https://www.sallyhewett.co.uk/photo_15860150.html)

piece looks real at first glance; the stretch marks are angry red, the scar bulbous and seems fresh; pubic stubble a beautiful, funny and complex combination. Each little dot is a tiny French knot, a type of embroidery stitch. Hewett’s *Her Story* (2017), depicts a thin, dark-skinned body, with

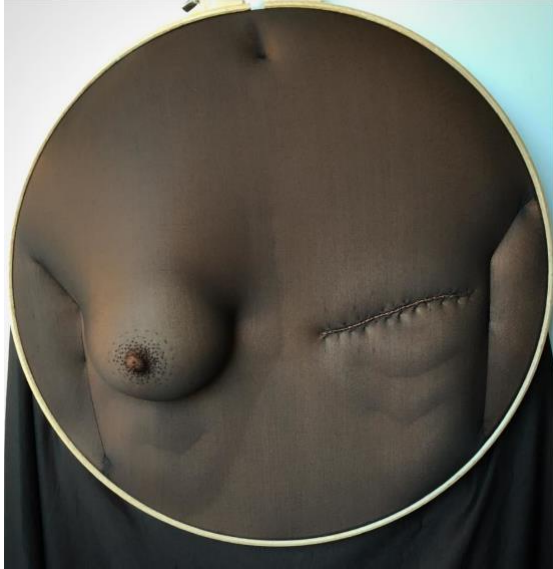


Figure 6 Sally Hewett *Her story*, 2017 Lycra, angelskin, foam, embroidery silk, quilting hoop. 66x33x13cm Photo by Sally Hewett [https://www.sallyhewett.co.uk/photo\\_16064260.html](https://www.sallyhewett.co.uk/photo_16064260.html)

ribcage showing, and a mastectomy scar with one intact breast. I find it difficult to look at the works that depict medical issues involving the skin; somehow, she's done it too well, as with the piece *Mastitis* (2019).

Hewett has made over thirty of just these medical/surgical inspired pieces, and many others that chronicle the body and its beauty through use of traditional textile techniques. These techniques were both passed down from her grandmother and

learned while in art school. Hewett's interest in the body and its associated detritus has spanned her career, but in the last couple of years she has experienced renewed interest in her work due in part to her success on Instagram. She has shown her pieces in locations as far from beyond her native London, as Germany, Los Angeles, and Brazil. Hewett's attention to detail and dedication to crafting these discomforting works of art allows us to reconsider what we find ugly.

In a work titled *Lekker indrukbaar*, Danish artist Anke Huyben created a series of cast bronze wearable objects that only she could wear. According to her artist statement this is:

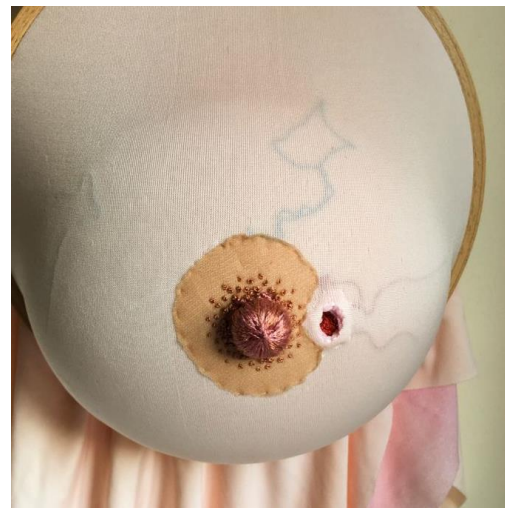


Figure 5 Sally Hewett *Mastitis*, 2019. Lycra, foam, embroidery silk, quilting hoop. Photo: Sally Hewett [https://www.sallyhewett.co.uk/photo\\_16421431.html](https://www.sallyhewett.co.uk/photo_16421431.html)

“a project about my body and how I sometimes am dissatisfied with it. To hide the parts of my body I feel insecure about I take certain postures to cover them up. But by assuming these postures I in fact draw attention to these body parts. The space between my breasts when I cross my arms, the space between my stomach and my crossed legs; these opening[s] in my closed postures are casted in bronze. By wearing these bronze objects I force myself in these comforting postures that, in contrary with their intention, emphasize my vulnerabilities,” (Huyben, 2017).

Her *Lekker indrukbaar* pieces are their own small sculptural forms, but when they come alive when she places them with her body. In a subsequent work, Huyben created medallions cast from her body to wear as “an answer” to *Lekker indrukbaar*. She wears her body proudly, as a medal, as something she fought for and that makes her happy. Huyben’s work influenced me by showing another artist coming from jewelry roots and pushing into working within the visual language of photography and objects that, without interaction, might not seem to have a real place. After

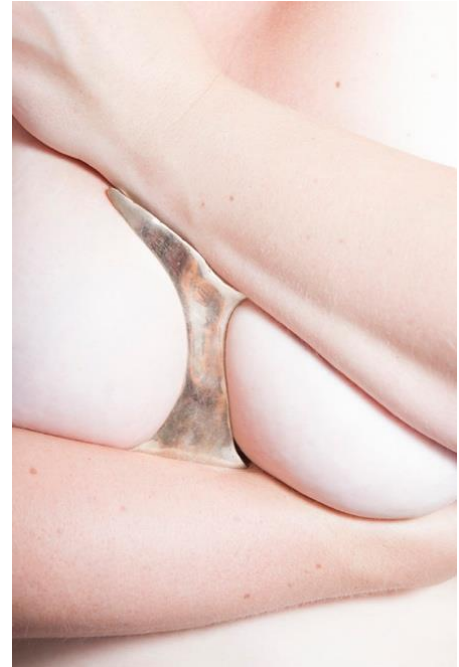


Figure 7. Anke Huyben *Lekker indrukbaar* Cast bronze Photo by Anies Gesnik. <http://www.ankehuyben.com/>

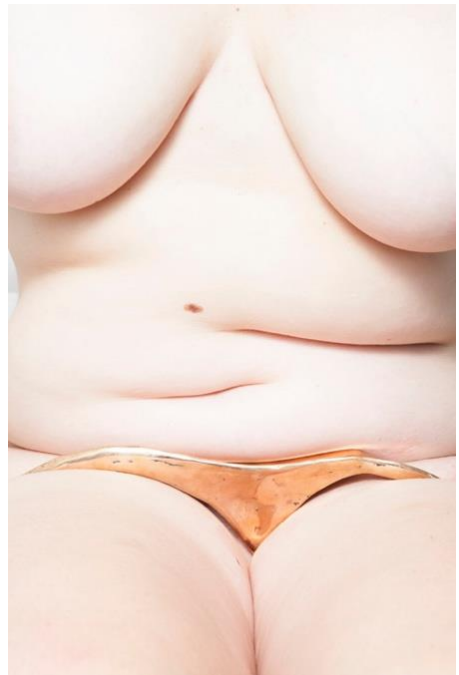


Figure 8. Anke Huyben Photo by Anies Gesnik.. <http://www.ankehuyben.com/>



examining her insecurities in *Lekker indrukbaar*, she took back ownership of her body for herself.



Figure 9. Anke Huyben *Medals*, 2017. Plaster, silicone, leather, brass. Photo: Anke Huyben <http://www.ankehuyben.com/>

Another metalsmith whose work deals with body shame is Breanna Ferrara. Ferrara is a Boston-area jeweler and artist who makes wearable art pieces that are exceedingly well crafted, over-indulgent, opulent, dripping and extremely colorful. In an interview with Gallery Baird, Ferrara is asked why she makes jewelry and adornment, and she says “I see [it] as a really intimate representation of emotion and self-expression because in most cases it is meant to interact directly with the body. I think of my jewelry as [...] a means of unburdening [the wearer] from shame.” Her work specifically deals with the shame associated with having a body that is typically seen as undesirable, unwanted, and unlovable. In the piece *Decorative Fruits*, a



larger form made of pink upholstery fabric features sterling silver pierced nipples. Each of the multitude of smaller blobs dripping off it is attached to a nipple with a fibula pin, and each of these connected to another with a string of pearls. Each blob has an enameled nipplelike piece at the terminus, sewn on with neon green thread; there are festoons of bead work where the blobs connect to the larger mass in pinks, black, silver, browns. The color scheme of the fabric are skin



Figure 10 Breana Ferrara, *Decorative Fruits (Detail)*, 2018 Upholstery fabric, sterling silver, fine silver, glass beads, freshwater pearls, enamel on copper, polyester, thread. 18 in x 24 in x 48 in. Image courtesy of artist.

tones: taupe, tan, pink, brown, which are accented by slime green and silver. The necklace portion is tenuous, seemingly too thin in relation to the entirety of the piece, and Ferrara models it by holding it in her hands. Ferrara's obsession with beautifying and opulently decorating this

lumpy form speaks to my desire to create beauty where most would see ugliness, and to experience that duality in my artistic endeavors.



*Figure 11* Breana Ferrara, *Decorative Fruits*, 2018 Upholstery fabric, sterling silver, fine silver, glass beads, freshwater pearls, enamel on copper, polyester, thread. 18 in x 24 in x 48 in

Substantia Jones is an artist and fat activist that lives and work in New York City. She has been photographing fat folks for over 12 years. She calls her work The Adipositivity Project and her mission statement from her website says:

“The Adipositivity Project aims to promote the acceptance of benign human size variation and encourage discussion of body politics, not by listing the merits of big people, or detailing examples of excellence (these things are

easily seen all around us), but rather through a visual display of fat physicality.

The sort that's normally unseen," (Jones, 2019).

Many of the photos from 2009 gallery on Jones' website are close-ups of fat bodies in varying degrees of undress; those that wear clothing are often wearing just lacey underwear, lingerie, or boots. Some photos are of the feet of fat people, or couples naked together, sharing a loving caress or simply being near each other while naked. Further, some photos are of fat people in a sexual context.

Ten years ago, these photos changed my idea of what I could be as a radical fat woman. I was the heaviest I had ever been, and in a terrible relationship I was planning on leaving as soon as I could. I needed these photos; they allowed me to see that I deserved to be loved, to be held,



Figure 12 Substantia Jones *Untitled* 2009 Digital Image, The Adipositivity Project

to be cared for; that my body wasn't disgusting, it was just as beautiful as these other bodies that looked so much like mine. The image that has been burned into my mind for ten years is one of a female-presenting body with lily tattoos up her thigh and on her stomach. Her belly is out, her hip is accentuated and she's nude [Fig 12]. I recall thinking when I saw this for the first time that it could have been my own body I was looking at, if not for the tattoo at the hip. I felt seen. I realized I had hated my body for over fifteen years. It was this sense of being seen, being acknowledged that allowed me to begin my journey toward radical body acceptance.



## THE WORK: *FEAR NOT THIS BODY*

There are three main components of the installation. The first is a series of ten self-portraits printed on nine-foot chiffon panels. The second is a set of nine formed and enameled copper handheld objects that I call *bodies*, which sit upon either a pink or white handmade faux fur pillow inside of a handmade wooden case mounted on the wall between the panels. The third is a wall that incorporates sticky-notes from an ongoing community-involved experiment, which allows the viewer/participant to write one of three phrases onto a sticky note and stick it to the wall under one of three columns.



*Plate 1 Fear Not This Body* installed in Gray Gallery. Photo by Carolyn Buss 2019

The nine-foot self-portrait panels printed on chiffon hang on curtain rods at a 90° angle from the wall. These self-portraits are images of my own fat, white, cis-female nude body. When installed, the panels alternate between vaguely-body-like and clearly-a-body, although the average viewer wouldn't know it was me unless they knew my tattoos or had met me. I cropped



*Plate 2* Self-portraits printed on chiffon fabric and hung at a 90-degree angle from the wall creating nooks. Photo by Jenni Farrow 2019.

these self-portraits for two reasons: the first was that I wanted to bring focus to a particular skin texture or formation, like stretch marks or rolls of fat. The second was to obscure the identity of the model, and to create some mystery. I wanted the viewer to not be focused on a face, and to subvert the trope of the Headless Fatty—that stock-imagery of fat bodies, all shown below the neck, head cut-off to preserve anonymity so that news reports can use them to discuss the “obesity epidemic” (Huer et al). Fat bodies are beautiful, though often vilified; I wanted to show a semi-



*Plate 3* Chiffon panels sway in the slightest breeze. Photo by Carolyn Buss. 2019

anonymous fat body in a way that was beautiful. Additionally, the panels are meant to envelop the viewer in flesh-suggestive nooks and, owing to the nature of the chiffon fabric they're printed on, they're the opposite of how we typically view fat bodies: weightless, airy, elegant, beautiful.



*Plate 4 Envelopment. Reception attendee inside a nook, holding a body. Photo by Jenni Farrow 2019*

Chiffon fabric is most commonly used for women's evening wear, and especially as an overlay, creating a diaphanous, light layer. Chiffon is "practically weightless and it seems that a person dressed in it hovers over the vanity and frailty of the world," (Balasa, 2019). My body is heavy, as far as bodies go, and societally, holds metaphorical weight for those who believe fat people are unhealthy and unattractive. Chiffon allows images of my body to influence the space with light feelings; sheer, rolling flesh creates an intimate space for the viewer to escape or be enveloped. This fabric choice allows one to see the shape of the person next to them while giving them the tenuous feeling of privacy, but a feeling tinged with the awareness of not being alone.

The objects, or bodies, nestled on the pink and white faux fur pillows (Plate 5) are made of copper that has been formed and then enameled. I formed the copper to represent fat rolls, cellulite and varicose veins using the traditional metalworking methods of chasing and repousse. I then drilled over a hundred holes along the edges of the metal and fired several layers of powdered glass onto the surface—a process called enameling. The surface texture of the glass is meant to represent various textures of skin: smooth and soft, or rough like psoriasis or eczema. The colors are human skin tones ranging from pink to tan to light and dark browns, as well as blueish, for very thin, pale skin.

Each of the nine bodies is enameled using many layers of glass fired onto the copper base metal after forming has already taken place. I chose to represent multiple tones of skin for the work to be more inclusive toward people of differing skin tones. It is important to me that the work be representative of the people who would come view it and experience it.

Every piece has a slightly different surface treatment as well. The dark brown varicose vein piece has a rough surface, which was created by firing a thin layer of larger particles of glass on top until they fused to the surface, but not long enough for them to flow and turn glassy and smooth. This texture is imitative of eczema or plaque psoriasis. The pink cellulite piece (Plate 5) is a few layers of opalescent white, which is more of a milky clear than true white, with a pink over the top fired just to the “wet sugar” phase, somewhere between “sugar” and “orange peel.” (See Appendix I for more information on enameling.)

The nine bodies are broken up further into three series of three bodies of the same shape. There is an hourglass, a drop, and pear-like shape. The hourglass shapes (Plates 5, 6) are formed to look like skin with cellulite—a formation of adipose tissue primarily found in the lower body near the buttocks, hips and thighs, though not solely limited to these areas (Rossi, Vergnanini).



Drop-shaped bodies are representative of varicose veins, and I primarily used large chasing tools to form for the varicose vein formations (Plates 7, 8). There are a few smaller vein portions where I used chasing and repousse to create a vein texture that represents what are colloquially called *spider veins*. These form just under the surface of the skin and radiate from a central point; they can coincide with varicose veins. The third shape is a bottom-heavy pear shape (Plates 9-11). These were the most labor-intensive in terms of forming, as they have been formed to mimic fat rolls.



*Plate 5* Pink hourglass body on pink pillow. Photo by Jenni Farrow. 2019



*Plate 6* Brown hourglass body on pink pillow. Photo by Jenni Farrow. 2019





*Plate 7* Dark brown teardrop body, varicose veins, rough surface texture. Photo by Jenni Farrow. 2019



*Plate 8* Pink teardrop body with varicose and spider veins. Photo by Jenni Farrow. 2019



*Plate 9* Orangey-tan pear body with formed fat rolls and rough surface texture. Photo by Jenni Farrow. 2019





*Plate 10* Deep brown body, with fat rolls and smooth surface. Photo by Jenni Farrow. 2019



*Plate 11* Pink body, formed fat rolls; smooth surface texture. Photo by Jenni Farrow.



The other side of these bodies are made of soft mesh fabric stuffed with silicone and faux pearls. I've hand-sewn the mesh fabric to the metal with a tenuous pink thread. They feel like flesh: sensual, soft, and a bit lumpy. The mesh is a specialty fabric used in brassieres, lingerie,



*Plate 12* Fabric and silicone side, shows sewn edge with pink thread with thumb pressing into the squishy surface, and lumps showing. Photo by Jenni Farrow. 2019

and swimwear, and has a very soft hand feel. Underneath the mesh, I've used silicone stick-on bra cups, which were meant to mimic skin while being worn with revealing clothing. I cut them to fit exactly within each metal shape using a disposable surgical knife. The goal for these was to mimic adipose tissue, or fat. I used varying sizes of faux pearls inside, from 8mm to 14mm. I felt the faux pearls were indicative of my conceptual message, even though they aren't visible. Pearls are symbolic of purity, wealth and femininity. That these are faux pearls inside denies the material value that many people place upon the pearl; that it is hidden, much like the pearl is in a clam, lends another facet to the idea of value and morality that we ascribe to thinness or fatness.

The pillows underneath are soft and huggable, and giving respite to the bodies, while seeming themselves like bodies. Much like fat bodies, faux fur is considered out-of-place in art let alone an art gallery: it is perceived as cheap, cutesy, and kitschy. Creating a sense of out-of-place-ness that also appeals to a wider audience is important to the content of the work. Color choice is important: purity and femininity are the main cultural signals that light pink and white encompass within Western cultures. Combined with the cheap interior-design feel of the faux fur, the audience is expected to be drawn to the work. Using pillows and feminine colors additionally lends a domestic feel to the work. The concept that beauty and tactile sensations bring people to look closer is one that I use throughout the work. The textures are about how the work *feels* in the hand, and how those sensations inspire feeling.



*Plate 13* Pink cellulite body on pink pillow with mirror that has the words "You are worthy of love" laser etched onto the mirror. Photo by Jenni Farrow. 2019

The idea to use handwriting from the community came after speaking with graphic designer Kayla Clark. We determined that asking the community to provide handwriting samples would best help people/participants feel like they might believe the words on the mirrors once they read them. Mirrors allow the viewer to see themselves in the phrases that have been laser etched onto the surface of the glass: “I love you”, “You are worthy of love” and “I can love others, I can love myself.” One statement: “You are worthy of love”, is given the sole job of sharing its message with the viewer as they go through the installation. It is placed within the center pillow, underneath a pink enameled body. The viewer picks up the body, and sees a reflection, then they lean over, read the message, and see themselves through the words. Ideally, they internalize the words, and take “You are worthy of love” to mean that they are worth loving, both by themselves and by others.



*Plate 14* Jenni Farrow explains how bodies are different to June Farrow. Photo by Carolyn Buss. 2019

## RESPONSE AND FUTURE WORK

This work was partly to help myself feel more confident and powerful, as with the self-portraits, but the interactive portion was for the audience to engage with, explore, and feel seen. I received comments in my guestbook at the exhibition, in person, and on social media from people about how the work impacted them in positive ways. One person wrote in my guestbook at the exhibition that as another woman of size, they were able to give themselves permission to like themselves after seeing and experiencing the exhibition. Another person said they wished they could take a piece of it with them as a reminder of how much it impacted them.

Outward validation is helpful in creating an internal reservoir of momentum, however it's just as important –if not more so–to believe in myself because I believe the work is worth it, that I'm worth the effort, time and love that goes into making artwork.

In future work, I plan to embellish the chiffon panels and the fabric on the back of the bodies to give more emphasis and decoration to the works. After reflecting on how people react to my jewelry when it is worn, I want to create a companion series of brooches and pendants. I'm curious about how wearing a simulacrum of a fat body would entice people to ask about the jewelry and the ideas behind it. People ask to touch art jewelry, especially when it is worn, and since touch is so important to the conceptual basis of this work, it might be a successful way to further my message.

Throughout the process of researching for this work, I had to confront my own implicit bias against fat people, which I had thought I moved passed. This shows that even though I've worked for years against the messages society has imposed, these messages are insidious. Body acceptance is an ongoing practice, not a finished product.

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## APPENDIX I – Glossary

*Chasing and repousse* – This technique has been used all over the world and at least for the last 3000 years, as evidenced by works in gold and silver from Europe, Egypt and the Middle East. The tools that go into making work that is formed using chasing and repousse are various styles of punches, a chasing hammer, and pitch. Pitch is used as a support of varying density to allow detailed chasing (best with harder pitch) or to allow for deep controlled volume best achieved with soft pitch. The pitch is made using a pine-tar base, though has in the past been a petroleum-based product, or in ancient times, beeswax and shellac. The punches have different shapes, but generally fall into one of a few categories: liner, pusher, embossing/texturing, or planishing. Chasing is characterized as creating a design or texture on metal with hammers or chasing tools from the front side and can be likened to sinking the metal. Repoussé refers to creating volume by pushing outward from the back side of the metal this hammers or chasing tools. Combining the two techniques allows me to push the metal into high relief, although it is often used for low relief work.

*Cis\*gender*– Referring to a person who lives the gender they are assigned at birth (as opposed to a transgender, intersex or nonbinary person who would have been assigned either male or female at birth).

*Enamel*– Colored glass ground to a fine powder fired onto a pure metal surface. Glass can be transparent, opaque or opalescent. The glass may include lead in its chemical make-up or be lead-free. Certain colors are best with lead, like reds and purples.

*Stages of Flow*– Optional Surface Texture for Enamel:

*Sugar* – A grainy, matte texture (1200°F to 1350°F)

*Wet Sugar*–Somewhat glossy but still grainy (1300°F-1400°F)

*Orange Peel* –Glossy but with dimples and may be lumpy. (1350°F-1420°F)

*Fully Flowed* –Fully glossed over and smooth (1375°F to 1500°F)

*Implicit Bias* - Implicit biases involve associations outside conscious awareness that lead to a negative evaluation of a person on the basis of irrelevant characteristics such as race or gender. (FitzGerald, Hurst 2017)



## APPENDIX II

### FAT LIBERATION MANIFESTO by Judy Freespirit and Aldebaran

1. WE believe that fat people are fully entitled to human respect and recognition.
2. WE are angry at mistreatment by commercial and sexist interests. These have exploited our bodies as objects of ridicule, thereby creating an immensely profitable market selling the false promise of avoidance of, or relief from, that ridicule.
3. WE see our struggle as allied with the struggles of other oppressed groups against classism, racism, sexism, ageism, financial exploitation, imperialism and the like.
4. WE demand equal rights for fat people in all aspects of life, as promised in the Constitution of the United States. We demand equal access to goods and services in the public domain, and an end to discrimination against us in the areas of employment, education, public facilities and health services.
5. WE single out as our special enemies the so-called “reducing” industries. These include diet clubs, reducing salons, fat farms, diet doctors, diet books, diet foods and food supplements, surgical procedures, appetite suppressants, drugs and gadgetry such as wraps and “reducing machines”.
6. WE demand that they take responsibility for their false claims, acknowledge that their products are harmful to the public health, and publish long-term studies proving any statistical efficacy of their products. We make this demand knowing that over 99% of all weight loss programs, when evaluated over a five-year period, fail utterly, and also knowing the extreme proven harmfulness of frequent large changes in weight.
7. WE repudiate the mystified “science” which falsely claims that we are unfit. It has both caused and upheld discrimination against us, in collusion with the financial interests of insurance companies, the fashion and garment industries, reducing industries, the food and drug industries, and the medical and psychiatric establishment.
8. WE refuse to be subjugated to the interests of our enemies. We fully intend to reclaim power over our bodies and our lives. We commit ourselves to pursue these goals together.

FAT PEOPLE OF THE WORLD, UNITE! YOU HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE ....

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